



How to Support **BISEXUAL YOUTH**



Ways to Care for Young People Who Are
Attracted to More Than One Gender

WELCOME!

At The Trevor Project, we're always working to create a safer world for LGBTQ youth. Our guide on "*How to Support Bisexual Youth: Ways to Care for Bisexual, Pansexual, Fluid, and Queer Youth Who are Attracted to More than One Gender*" is an introductory educational resource that covers a wide range of topics and best practices for supporting the bisexual youth in your life, which may include yourself! Educating ourselves is an ongoing practice, and how we define and express identity is an ongoing journey. We are all here to learn!

LGBTQ young people in search of support can contact The Trevor Project 24/7 through our TrevorLifeline at 1-866-488-7386, via chat at [TheTrevorProject.org/Help](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/help), or by texting START to 678-678.



About the illustrator:

Ashley Lukashevsky is an illustrator and visual artist from Honolulu, Hawaii, now living in occupied Tongva land, Los Angeles. Her work focuses on issues related to immigrant rights, racial justice, LGBTQIA+ equality, and gender equity. She's a proud bi baby!

WHAT IS BISEXUALITY?

Bisexuality is a sexual orientation, and bisexual (commonly abbreviated to “bi”) people are those who have the capacity to form attraction and/or relationships to more than one gender. Bisexual advocate Robyn Ochs’ popular definition of bisexuality is, “*The potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.*” Bisexual people make up a significant portion of queer young people. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Youth Risk Behavior Survey, bisexual people comprised 75% of young people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.¹ Remember, people of any gender can identify as bisexual or be attracted to more than one gender.



1 Underwood JM, Brener N, Thornton J, et al. Overview and Methods for the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System — United States, 2019. MMWR Suppl 2020;69(Suppl-1):1–10. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su6901a1>

Is bisexuality binary?

Some argue that bisexuality reinforces the gender binary because the prefix bi- in bisexual comes from the Greek prefix for “two.” Many words that describe sexuality were originally rooted in the gender binary, due to limited understandings of gender at the time by larger society. (For example: “heterosexuality” has the prefix hetero- which comes from Greek, meaning “the other of two; different.”) However, the historical and cultural definition of the term bisexual has always referred to more than one gender, and the current definition is not specifically binary. Identity definitions are not just literal. They are a part of our ever-evolving language that reflects the diversity of the people using these words.

What about pansexuality?

Some people use the word *pansexual* to describe their attraction to more than one gender. Pansexuality is defined as an attraction to people of any gender or to people regardless of their gender, with the prefix pan- coming from the Greek prefix for “all.” Some people may use the words bisexual and pansexual interchangeably, and others use only one word exclusively to describe themselves. It’s important to ask what words a person would like to use to describe themselves, rather than assuming or defining for other people. There is no “better” identity term, there is only the best identity term for you.

Other ways to identify

The Trevor Project’s 2019 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health found that respondents used more than 100 different terms to label their sexuality! Identities like *omnisexual*, *abrosexual*, and *skoliosexual* may also describe a form of attraction to more than one gender, though these identities are not necessarily synonymous or interchangeable with the word bisexual.

Multisexual refers to all identities that include romantic and/or sexual attraction to people of more than one gender. This is in contrast to monosexuality, which is defined as identities involving attraction to people of a single gender, such as exclusively gay or straight identities. Multisexual identities include:

- **Queer** refers to an identity that expands outside of heterosexuality. Due to its history as a reclaimed slur and use in political movements, queer still holds political significance.
- **Pansexual** is an identity term for romantic and/or sexual attraction to people regardless of gender identity or to people of all genders. For some pansexual people, gender is not a defining characteristic of the attraction they feel to others. Other pansexual folks may feel that gender is a significant part of their experience of attraction.
- **Omnisexual** refers to someone who is attracted to people of all genders, and for whom gender plays an important part of attraction.
- **Abrosexual** describes one’s sexual attraction that is fluid and constantly changing.
- **Skoliosexual** is a term that refers to attraction to trans and nonbinary people.
- **Fluid** refers to someone who experiences changes in their sexual attraction over time and/or depending on the situation. Some people may find that who they are attracted to and/or the intensity of those feelings change over different days or depending on who they are in a relationship with. *Remember, while sexuality can be fluid, attempts to forcibly change a person’s sexuality, such as with the discredited practice of conversion therapy, are harmful and ineffective.*

Some multisexual people use more than one of these labels. People may share different labels for their identities depending on the context or who they are speaking to. For example, a person may define themselves as bisexual to a relative who is unfamiliar with LGBTQ identities, but further specify their identity as fluid or pansexual when talking to friends within the queer and trans community. Other people may use one label exclusively no matter who they are speaking with. It’s OK to use one label or multiple labels for your identity.

Romantic orientations

LGBTQ youth are finding more expansive ways than ever to describe their attraction, including when it comes to defining their romantic orientation. These terms are important for *asexual* (or ace) people who experience little to no sexual attraction. Many asexual people desire romantic relationships, and romantic orientations are a way for aces to communicate who they prefer to date or form relationships with. You may hear some asexual people define their orientation with terms like *biromantic* or *panromantic*. LGBTQ young people who do not identify as asexual may use romantic orientations to clarify the nuances of their orientation as well. Whether your attraction to more than one gender is sexual or romantic, you are welcome in the bi community.

Do we need labels?

Labels can be a huge source of self-understanding for some LGBTQ people. Because we live in a society where everyone is assumed and expected to be straight and cisgender, finding the words to define yourself can be an act of liberation. Labels can help connect people to one another, allowing them to feel less alone and to create community together. Labels also allow researchers to study marginalized groups, giving us important information to better understand and support these groups.

While labels feel meaningful for some LGBTQ people, labels can feel restrictive for others. It's OK to explore different labels or to avoid labels altogether! You are never required to label your identity in a particular way or to disclose your identity, especially if doing so would compromise your safety.

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WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO SUPPORT BISEXUAL YOUTH

While all LGBTQ young people are at a higher risk of experiencing negative mental health outcomes than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, it's worth noting that bisexual youth statistically face more challenges than lesbian and gay youth as well. According to The Trevor Project's research, almost half of bisexual youth seriously considered suicide in the past year. 66% of bisexual youth reported feeling sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row in the past year, compared to 27% of their heterosexual peers and 49% of their gay/lesbian peers. Additionally, more than one in three bisexual youth reported being bullied at school, and one in five bisexual youth reported being forced to have

sexual intercourse. These outcomes for harassment, sexual assault, and rape are particularly severe for bisexual people as compared to their straight, gay, and lesbian peers.

These statistics underscore the need to increase public understanding and support for bisexual youth. They also remind us that no matter what words we use to describe an attraction to more than one gender, as a whole, this group faces significant obstacles and unique challenges. We must do more to make the world a safer place for bisexual young people.



SUPPORTING YOURSELF AND EACH OTHER

Whether you are bisexual yourself or care deeply about the bi youth in your life, we can all learn more about how to create safer environments for bi people.

Preventing bisexual erasure and biphobia

What is biphobia?

Biphobia is defined as the fear, intolerance, or hatred of people who experience attraction to people of more than one gender. Biphobia can compromise the mental health and safety of bi young people. For bi youth who live at the intersection of other marginalized identities, the impacts of biphobia are amplified. Common examples of biphobia include:

- Negative reactions to people coming out as bi.
- Comments about how bi people aren't real or need to "choose a side."
- Gatekeeping who is "really" bi, straight, or gay, based on who they've been in relationships with or are currently dating.
- Acceptance of a bi person only when they are in a relationship with a person of a different gender, as in when friends or family members only encourage a bi person to engage in relationships with people who identify as straight.
- Acceptance of a bi person only when they are in a relationship with a person of the same gender, as in when peers in the queer community only encourage a bi person to engage in relationships with people who identify as lesbian or gay.
- Assuming that bi people are untrustworthy, more likely to cheat, or hypersexual.
- Physical or sexual violence against bi people on the basis of their identity.
- Structural biases, like being dismissed by doctors, not being hired for jobs, or being denied housing due to one's identity.

Internalized biphobia is defined as the belief system that bi people are taught about themselves by living in a biphobic society. This includes the false belief that bi people are valued less than their heterosexual, lesbian, or gay peers, or that being bisexual is something to be ashamed of or to hide. Given widespread homophobia, there is often social pressure for bi people to not identify within the bisexual spectrum and instead reject labels altogether. It takes time and education to unlearn the impacts of internalized biphobia and to cultivate self-acceptance.

What is bisexual erasure?

Bisexual erasure, or *bi-erasure*, is an element of biphobia, in which the existence and legitimacy of bisexuality are questioned or denied outright. Examples of bi-erasure include:

- Assuming that two people of the same gender dating means they are gay, or two people of different genders dating are straight.
- Assuming that all queer people are either lesbians or gay.
- Saying that bisexuality is a phase.
- Speaking for bisexual people by saying that they aren't actually bi, or by labeling their identity differently, such as saying, "you're really a lesbian."
- Denying the existence of bisexuality in its entirety.

Challenging assumptions

One of the main ways to support bisexual youth is to actively challenge biphobic assumptions in our everyday lives. Biphobia can be found in both straight and queer communities, so it's important to address it no matter where it originates. Here are some tips to support bi youth:

- If you assume that a person is gay or straight based on their current relationship, work to reframe your understanding that the people in that relationship could be of any gender or sexual orientation.
- Take people for their word if they share a multisexual identity with you.
- Affirm and uplift the bisexual people in your life.
- If you see or hear an example of biphobia or bi-erasure, address it by sharing that bisexuality is real and valid, as well as resources to learn more about bi identities.

Self-care

Dealing with biphobia can be tough, exhausting, and painful for those who are attracted to more than one gender. If you identify as bi and are struggling with biphobia or bi-erasure, finding ways to take care of yourself is a great way to stay resilient and cope. You can practice self-care by:

- Finding community with other bi people who know what biphobia feels like and can offer support.
- Connecting with a support system that can accept and validate you for who you are.
- Learning more about bisexual activists and the long history of bisexual advocacy.
- Exploring media and literature that reflects nuanced and positive representation of bi people and characters.
- Using creative outlets to express your bi identity, such as creating art to express yourself or journaling about your identity.
- Writing affirmations for yourself that highlight how beautiful your bisexuality is.
- Reaching out on TrevorSpace to connect with others and contacting The Trevor Project by phone, chat, or text when you're struggling.

Things to remember when navigating gender and bisexuality

Gender and sexuality are different, and just because you know a person's gender doesn't mean you know their sexuality. People of any gender can identify as bisexual, but depending on your gender, you may experience issues related to your sexuality that are specific to that gender. Bisexual people can encounter unique considerations when navigating gender and gender-related experiences. Bisexuality is a valid identity for many, and bisexual people of all genders deserve safety and celebration for their identities.

Transitioning may affect how you identify your sexuality

Transitioning refers to the medical, social, and/or legal changes made to help someone feel a greater sense of alignment with their gender, how they see themselves, and how they navigate the world. As people explore new ways of seeing themselves in the world, it is common for attraction to shift. If you notice changes in your attraction after transition, it's OK to play around with new labels or no labels at all to find what works best for you! Not all people who transition find this to be the case for them, and that is valid too.

Nonbinary people can be bisexual

Gender identity expands far outside the man/woman gender binary. Nonbinary people experience their gender outside of the gender binary and may come to understand their sexuality in a variety of ways. While nonbinary people can be bisexual, just because you identify as nonbinary does not mean you “have” to use a specific label for your sexuality. It's OK to explore different labels that describe an attraction to more than one gender, and it's also OK to identify as both bisexual and nonbinary.

Men can be bisexual, too

Bisexual men are often invalidated for their sexual orientation, because of the stigma that for men, any attraction to people outside of women is interpreted and labeled as gay. Men should be allowed to express and experience attraction to people of more than one gender, just like everyone else.

Bisexual women are valid

For women who express attraction outside of men, there can be a false, harmful narrative that they are only doing it for the attention of men or that they are just experimenting. Because of this, bi women are often oversexualized and invalidated. Bisexuality for many women, just as for people of other genders, is a valid identity that isn't defined by a person's current partner or relationships. Given the high rates of violence and sexual assault of bi women,^{2,3} it's extremely important to support and protect bi women.

Navigating relationships

Exploring different relationship types

Biphobia can present itself in different ways, depending on an individual's relationship structure. For bi people in monogamous relationships (the practice of having a single partner at a time), there are often assumptions that a bi person is unable to stay committed to that one partner. It is very important to note that bi people are able to stay committed in monogamous relationships the same way people of other sexual orientations are.

2 Rostad, W. L., Clayton, H. B., Estefan, L. F., & Johns, M. M. (2020). Substance use and disparities in teen dating violence victimization by sexual identity among high school students. *Prevention science*, 21(3), 398–407.

3 The Trevor Project Research Brief: Bisexual Youth Experience. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/03/26/research-brief-bisexual-youth-experience/>

There are unfair assumptions that because bi people have the capacity for attraction to more than one gender, they must by default be *polyamorous* (relating to the practice of engaging in multiple relationships with the consent and knowledge of all people involved) or *non-monogamous* (an umbrella term for intimate relationships that are not strictly monogamous). This is not the case for all bi people, and whether someone is monogamous or non-monogamous cannot be determined by their sexuality or gender alone. Additionally, biphobia can create a false belief that desiring a polyamorous relationship structure is greedy, but everyone deserves the kind of relationship that allows them to feel supported and fulfilled. A person of any sexual orientation can have any relationship type or structure, and one is no more valid than another.

How do I tell if my relationship is healthy or not?

According to our analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 21% of bi youth⁴ (24% female and 8% male) reported having been forced to have sexual intercourse, compared to 16% gay and lesbian and 5% of heterosexual youth.⁵ People of all genders and sexual orientations can be survivors of sexual assault and intimate partner violence, but it's important to highlight that bisexual women are at significant risk for both physical and sexual intimate partner violence.⁶

Healthy relationships are built upon trust, respect, and safety. Partners should celebrate your bisexual identity, help you feel understood, and provide space to talk about power dynamics that exist in your relationship. Unfortunately, some people utilize biphobia to threaten, coerce, or intimidate their bi partners. A relationship may be unhealthy or abusive if your partner:

- Dismisses your bisexuality as a phase.
- Makes fun of your bisexuality.
- Uses your bisexual identity to claim that you cannot be trusted or to accuse you of cheating.
- Is overly jealous of people of different genders in your life.
- Forces you to identify as either gay or straight.
- Threatens to out you to people in your life.
- Works to separate you from communities of significance to you.
- Manipulates your identity and the stigma associated with it to keep you in the relationship.

If you're worried about your relationship or your safety, please contact [The Trevor Project](#) or [RAINN](#) (The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) for additional guidance and support. Remember, you are worthy of healthy, enriching relationships and you never have to navigate these issues alone.

4 The Trevor Project Research Brief: Bisexual Youth Experience. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/2019/03/26/research-brief-bisexual-youth-experience/>

5 **Note:** the CDC does not gather inclusive data on nonbinary young people yet, but we know that trans and nonbinary people are at high risk for physical and sexual violence.

6 Rostad, W. L., Clayton, H. B., Estefan, L. F., & Johns, M. M. (2020). Substance use and disparities in teen dating violence victimization by sexual identity among high school students. *Prevention science*, 21(3), 398-407.

CELEBRATE BISEXUALITY

Celebrating you!

The bisexual community is filled with resilient, vibrant, talented, compassionate, and inspiring people who deserve to be supported. If you are a bisexual person navigating your identity, know that you are an important part of the LGBTQ community. Remember:

- You do not need to come out for your identity to be valid. It's OK to share your identity or identities with whoever you like on your own time, or to decide that you never want to share. It does not make you any less bisexual.
- Who you are attracted to, who you date, or who you have sex with does not make you any less or more bi. You never have to prove your sexuality, and it's important to always prioritize consent and your safety.
- If your identity shifts, it does not change the fact that your previous identity was valid and true to you at the time. It may feel like you are reinforcing a stereotype, but you are not. You are living truthfully, and it is not your responsibility to combat other people's biases.
- Your bisexuality is real and valid. You deserve so much kindness, care, and celebration for being exactly who you are!

Creating community support

By reading this guide and learning more about bisexuality, you are helping to make this world a more accepting place for bisexual people. It is on everyone to work together to build better, safer communities. Here are some steps to take:

- Educate yourself by reading articles or books, listening to podcasts, or watching videos by bi people about their experiences.
- Listen to bi people, but never require bi people to educate you on their identity.
- Break down the internalized biases that we all hold, which includes working to not make assumptions about people's identities, experiences, or relationships.
- Create safe spaces and conversations where bi people can be their authentic selves.

Who you are attracted to, who you date, or who you have sex with does not make you any less or more bi.

CONCLUSION & RESOURCES

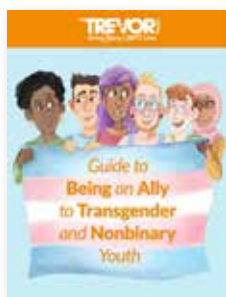
Thank you so much for taking the time to read through our Guide on “*How to Support Bisexual Youth: Ways to Care for Bisexual, Pansexual, Fluid, and Queer Youth Who are Attracted to More than One Gender.*” There is so much more to learn about how we can work to create safer, more affirming communities. By committing to learning more and putting our knowledge into practice, we can create a more accepting world.



**TrevorLifeline,
TrevorText & TrevorChat**

www.TheTrevorProject.org/Help

If you or someone you know is feeling hopeless or suicidal, contact The Trevor Project.



**Guide to Being an Ally
to Transgender and
Nonbinary Youth**

TRVR.org/TGNBally



**Coming Out:
A Handbook for
LGBTQ Young People**

TRVR.org/ComingOut



**Protect Your Space
And Well-being
On Instagram**

TRVR.org/InstagramWellBeing



The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning young people.



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